

COLUMBIA LIBRARIES OFFSITE



1002338564

**RECAP**

DELAIDE

NEILSON

Columbia University  
in the City of New York

THE LIBRARIES







BRANDER MUSEUM  
DRAMATIC MUSEUM

# LILIAN ADELAIDE NEILSON.

A Memorial Sketch,

*PERSONAL AND CRITICAL.*







"Is memor neghe mei!"  
John Adelaide Lee-Milson



# LILIAN ADELAIDE NEILSON.

## A Memorial Sketch,

*PERSONAL AND CRITICAL.*

BY

M. A. DE LEINE.

' Death lies on her, like an untimely frost  
Upon the sweetest flower of all the field.

\* \* \* \*

Her body lies in Capel's monument,  
And her immortal part with angels lives.'

ROMEO AND JULIET.



LONDON :

NEWMAN AND CO.,

43. HART STREET, BLOOMSBURY, W.C.

1881.

825.1289

N313

# LILIAN ADELAIDE NEILSON.

*A Memorial Sketch, Personal and Critical.*



IT is an axiom of the actor's profession, that to win and preserve the esteem of the public, one must always be before the public. Should an artist court retirement he is sure to lose ground with his patrons ; and only too often has it been proved that as soon as he has quitted the stage he drops out of memory and regard, and when he makes his final exit from the world there are few who care to follow him to the grave ; although in the days of his popularity they may have clamoured eagerly for a friendly touch of his hand, and been proud of being asked to

sit at his table. The shockingly sudden death of Miss Neilson on the 15th of last August immediately after her arrival in Paris after an exceptionally successful but most laborious tour in America very naturally made a deep and painful impression on the public mind; but one was scarcely prepared for the strong demonstration of earnest personal regard it called forth from all classes. As a beautiful woman, an accomplished actress, and a charming companion to those who had the privilege of sharing that companionship, her loss was immeasurably great; but that those who had never spoken to her in their lives, nor been blessed with one of her sweet smiles should talk of her death as of a personal grief was certainly surprising; and there are many, I am sure, who would like to keep by them some small memorial of one who afforded them so much delight.

It is not my intention to pry at all into the private life of one who lived so much for art alone, nor do I pretend to know more of

that life than many others; but it was my happiness to meet her first in a quiet country rectory, where I only knew her in her private capacity and where some time elapsed before I found out what she was to the world. I had read of her in the public journals and seen her photographs in the shop windows, but I had no idea that the lady who was introduced to me one summer evening as 'my daughter-in-law,' by a noble-looking old clergyman, the rector of the parish in which I had come to live, was the celebrated Miss Neilson. She had just returned from America and was as blithe-hearted and merry as any of the country girls around. From that time we were as good and firm friends as two people could be, one of whose lives was spent in the unvarying monotony of a country village, and the other in a ceaseless whirl of professional excitement and social gaiety.

A dramatic artist lives a double life often marked by strong contrasts. The smiles and blandishments of the stage are essentially

stage properties, like the costumes he wears, and vanish from the face before the rouge is washed from the cheek. It was not so with Miss Neilson. Whether on or off the stage she always tried to give pleasure to those below her station as well as to those on her level or above it, so that even her washer-woman was obliged to confess that she had rather be scolded by her than not noticed at all; and it was especially striking at her funeral that so many of those who stood around her grave were women of apparently the lower middle and even working classes, whose eyes betokened that it was no holiday spectacle they had come to witness, but the burial of one who in some way or other had endeared herself to their hearts.

The story currently received as to her origin was that she was born at Saragossa in Spain, her father being a Spanish artist and her mother an Englishwoman; that she afterwards went to Paris, and was there diligently instructed in English, and that

when quite a little girl she was taken to see a performance of 'Phêdre,' which determined her subsequent career. This seems to have been repeated in one form and another by different authorities and was certainly circulated in some of the theatres where she played, and as her name of Lilian Adelaide Neilson was assumed for professional purposes an assumed birth and parentage may be just as allowable ; but people's inquisitiveness has, since her death, found out another and more probable account of her origin and childhood which has appeared in several popular journals.

In the spot she called her 'home' her birth and early life were rarely if ever alluded to, and her friends are free to believe which story they think the likelier ; either that she was the child of a mixed English and Spanish parentage, or that she first saw the light in Queen's Square, Leeds, being the daughter of a basket-maker, and that her birth was registered as that of Elizabeth Ann Brown, born March 3rd, 1849 or '39. Her

beauty was certainly of that rich southern type that could be better accounted for by the first of these stories ; but others attribute it to her being of gipsy origin. *Truth* says she was born of an English father and gipsy mother. *The World* calls her a 'gipsy-girl ;' and another society journal speaks of her as 'a veritable Spanish gipsy.' From similar authorities we learn that in early life she evinced a strong passion for the stage ; and one night, after shaking hands with her uncle on old Leeds bridge, she ran away from home, and eventually found herself in London. She was then scarcely thirteen years of age. Joining the *corps de ballet* at one of the metropolitan theatres, she made her first appearance on the stage in 'The Yorkshire Lass.' This may be correct, but I hardly think so. Many whom one would expect to know the truth, never spoke of this part of her professional life ; and I do not think her connection with the theatre began till after her marriage.



It is no secret that this turned out very unfortunately. Her husband was the son of a country clergyman. In his wanderings he had met the beautiful young girl, had been captivated by her bright dark eyes and charming manners, and honestly but perhaps thoughtlessly offered her marriage and was accepted. His parents were of course dismayed at what they looked upon as a terrible *mésalliance*, but their hearts soon got the better of their resentment, and the lovely bride was brought to her father-in-law's rectory, and there openly acknowledged as his son's true and lawful wife; nor was it bare acknowledgment she received. For many years, indeed up to the old gentleman's death in 1876, she was welcomed there with the tenderest parental affection and was always spoken of in the most loving terms. Again and again did she visit 'home' in the intervals of her professional engagements, always bringing with her the sunshine of a happy temper and a bright face. One and another of her fellow-artists accompanied her

in these holiday retreats; and great was the merriment in the simple household at the rectory when 'Lil' and her friends paid their visits. The farmers round were delighted at her coming amongst them, and their daughters were proud to chat with one whose name had appeared in all the great cities of England and America as '*The Neilson.*' Old women too, tottering to their graves, used to be cheered by her presence at their firesides or by her kindly talk in the sunny lane and the village lads became her doughty champions.

It was amid such associations I first met her, and there was certainly nothing of the actress about her home life. A peep at her photographic album and a superabundance of portraits of Miss Neilson first aroused my curiosity as to her identity with the popular artist who had been delighting the town as Amy Robsart and Juliet when she noticed my perplexity, and was very much surprised to discover my ignorance. That summer was remarkable for the profusion of May-blossom

that made all the hawthorn hedges shine like snow-drifts and that filled the air with fragrance. Her delight in these country beauties was almost childish in its simplicity and fervour, and she was looking forward with the glee of a school-girl to a six months' tour through France and the neighbourhood of the Rhine. She laughingly recalled the times when the grey-haired ex-senior fellow of Brazenose tried to drum into her mind the elements of Latin, exemplified chiefly in her memory by the quotations and mottoes that head the pages of Maunders's 'Treasury.' 'Ne quid nimis' and 'Ne quid temere' were frequent ejaculations in the little circle at ——. Her great delight was to ride out with her father-in-law, who in horsemanship was a companion many a bold rider feared to follow, and occasionally she was to be seen in the hunting-field, where her beauty of figure and equestrian skill were rivals which should show off the other to the greatest perfection.

In her life at home there was nothing so

noticeable as the entire absence of ill-nature. She rarely passed an opinion of any kind upon her fellow-artists, and she never displayed any pique or chagrin at the criticisms passed upon herself. Her success was of course a matter of intense self-gratulation ; she felt that everything depended upon it, and she knew that the moment she ceased to attract her fortunes would decline, and the greater number of those who now wished to be thought her friends would fall away from her side.

Her health was far from good, owing no doubt to the unnatural life she lived, full of excitement, steeped in hard work or as hard play, worried with business details, and over-wrought with correspondence. She was not one to take things quietly. Her friends used to smile at her complaints of nervous dyspepsia, which she seemed by her habits to foster rather than fight against ; but they soon proved terribly real, and her life was often a hard struggle between the suffering flesh and the willing spirit.

Her rest in the autumn of 1876 was the means of restoring her jaded nerves and shattered strength; and she returned to —— at Christmas, in wonderful health and spirits. In a short time she intended to open at the Haymarket with Tom Taylor's historical poetical drama of 'Ann Boleyn.' The story was an attractive one to her, and she had procured the costliest dresses from Paris to assist her illustration of the leading *rôle*. Those few days she was full of merriment. It brimmed over in her beautiful eyes and sparkling manners. A little melody she had caught up in Paris was constantly on her lips, and she was ever singing about the house in tones of genuine light-heartedness, 'Je suis content, je suis content, je suis content,' till all around seemed to take the happy infection. She dressed very quietly at home, and wore scarcely any jewelry; but there was a bracelet of great value, that had been given her in America which on a particular Sunday morning she had clasped over her glove. In church she found out it had gone. Her

dismay of course was great, and as she tried in dumb show to explain to a lady near her what had happened, the good old rector was sadly disturbed at the irreverence of his 'Lil.' There was no choice but to go out and seek the missing treasure, and it could nowhere be found, but fortunately it had been picked up by a passing labourer, who honestly without hope of fee or reward had given it to his master, by whom it was restored to its lawful owner. She was very proud of these American offerings, that were often so unique in their form and quaint in their design. In one instance a ship was brought on the stage, the hull of which was formed of camellias, and the rigging of lilies of the valley; in another she was presented with a large portrait of herself, framed with white flowers and surmounted by a white dove brooding. In England such demonstrations would seem forced and extravagant, although they appear natural enough across the water. But perhaps the strangest present she ever received was a young bear given her no doubt as a fine

practical joke by a brother artist when they were both acting in America. Miss Neilson was celebrating her birthday and receiving visitors in a large room in the hotel when a mysterious package arrived with Mr. ——'s compliments, wishing Miss Neilson many happy returns of the day. On being opened a little bear gravely walked out and proceeded to make a leisurely inspection of the company. The ladies shrieked and the gentlemen tried to laugh it off, but made way for the eccentric visitor with astonishing alacrity. One of them sprang on to the mantel-shelf and disengaged the fire-hose in the hope that a steady douch-bath would render young Bruin less sensible to the charms their persons might otherwise have had to his eyes and appetite. But the lady of the day was quite equal to the occasion. Coming forward with a plate of strawberries and cream in her hand she so temptingly proffered the delicacy that the brute was captivated, captured, and then quietly led back to his cage—another instance of Beauty

and the Beast. But it was not all profit and pleasure in America. Her success aroused furious jealousies. It was very galling to some of the American ladies that a young Englishwoman should come out to play in their theatres at a rate of remuneration they could never hope to obtain, and in many petty ways she suffered annoyance. At one place, it was given out that she had left her last hotel without paying her cab-hire, and paragraphs appeared in the local papers, headed 'Miss Neilson and her Cab-fare.' The fact was that whilst stepping into her hotel to get change to pay the cab-hire, the driver thoughtlessly drove off unpaid; but somehow the story got abroad, and even so trivial an occurrence as this was not thought beneath the notice of those who were envious of her charms. She dwelt that Christmas Day with intense thankfulness on the contrast it presented to the last. Then she was lying ill and helpless in her hotel at New Orleans at the time the city was convulsed with almost civil war; and as



she lay in bed she heard the shots, and cries, and tumult in the street below. Often afterwards she spoke with a shudder of the Christmas she had spent in the South.

She did not open the season of 1876 with 'Ann Boleyn' as she had intended, but determined to whet the public appetite with her favourite and famous impersonation of Juliet. That always drew and indeed, as G. A. Sala says, one could go fifty times running to see her Juliet however critically inclined we might feel with regard to some other of her conceptions. 'Ann Boleyn' did not succeed. On the first night it was intolerably long, and all the papers were filled the following Monday morning with dolorous accounts of the tedious hours their representatives had spent the previous Saturday evening. Miss Neilson herself attributed its failure to its Protestant character and said Roman Catholics, who formed a large proportion of the theatre-going class, would not listen to it.

The play seemed attractive. It was well rendered all round, was beautifully mounted,

and one or two of the minor characters were exceptionally acted, Arthur Cecil's Spanish ambassador being specially noticeable; but it did not pay, and had to be withdrawn. 'To-morrow,' she said to me gleefully on the last day of its representation, 'I go back to my dear Shakespeare, and I shall make money;' a matter that she might naturally congratulate herself on when she found out that all the expense and trouble to which she had put herself with 'Ann Boleyn,' had gone for nothing with the public. It was her birthday, and as she was sitting at luncheon, Tom Taylor, whose unfortunate offspring had just been so decidedly damned, came in to offer his congratulations and his condolences at the ill success of their joint venture. They were couched in some neat and cheery verses which she read with intense pleasure and put away with many similar tributes from Longfellow and others more or less known to fame, of some of whom the world has never heard and probably never will hear anything. But, whilst

annoyed at the failure of any play in which she appeared, she never let her spirits succumb to adverse fortune. Let the odds be what they might she fought the battle with unflinching courage, and never gave up the struggle till the issue was beyond all hope and doubt. 'Never mind,' she would say to her disheartened friends, 'we will pull it through yet.' But it is questionable whether she had that surpassing dramatic genius that by its own inherent might could support a play that had no elements of strength in itself.

After the Christmas of 1875 she never returned to the rectory. Her father-in-law died the next summer and the home was broken up; and during her next tour in America in 1876, she obtained a divorce from her husband in the American courts, having first been naturalised as a citizen of the States. This is no place to enter into details as to the cause of trouble between husband and wife. The marriage in the beginning was fraught with danger, but to the last she dwelt with intense delight on the love and

affection she received from her parents-in-law, and the happy days she spent 'at home.' It was always a calm and quiet retreat from the worries and excitements of her public career, a nook which scandal seldom reached, and where it was certainly not believed, and a scene of simple but sincere piety and peace. The memory of her fondly-loving father-in-law and his gentle kindly wife must have been to her a source of constant comfort and refreshment. When occasion called, and opportunity offered she gave her services as a reader in aid of different church and school enterprises in the neighbourhood of——, and greatly astonished and delighted the simple country folk who heard her recite Tennyson's 'May Queen' till they could see 'real tears,' as they emphatically called them, running down her cheeks. The gentry around were of course not so easily moved, and no doubt many of them looked rather shyly at the actress, even when a rector's daughter, though they could not be insensible to her charms of feature and fascination of

manner and we suspect not a few of the younger clerical brethren were eager to catch her smiles and press her hand. She was accustomed at that time to sign herself "Lee-Neilson," but in her will executed after her American divorce she styles herself "Lilian Adelaide Lee, wife of Philip Lee." Whether she considered her divorce valid in England or not we cannot tell, but it is evident her husband did, as he married again during her lifetime, repeating the ceremony, however, after her death, to avoid any unpleasant consequences.

Whether Miss Neilson had any connection with the stage or not before her marriage is uncertain, but soon after she placed herself under the instruction of Mr. John Ryder for whom she always entertained the greatest esteem, and who must have felt himself amply rewarded for his painstaking care by the eminence to which his fair pupil afterwards attained. The story of her dramatic career is comprised within few years beginning with 1865 and closing 1880. In fifteen years she

rose to a height of popularity, which in America at least has been unapproached by any actress of modern times, and had produced in London and the provinces some of the loveliest creations of Shakespeare's genius.

Her first essay was at the little theatre at Margate in the character of Julia in 'The Hunchback,' almost the last of the characters in which London playgoers had an opportunity of seeing her before she left town for America. I can find no recorded criticism of this juvenile performance, for at the time it appears she was not more than sixteen; but it seems to have been so far successful as to lead to an engagement at the Royalty Theatre, Soho, where in July, 1865, she appeared as Juliet, a character she made completely her own and which it seemed almost absurd for anyone else to attempt so long as she was on the stage. At first however she attracted no particular notice from either the Press or the public; but privately she received great encouragement

to persevere especially from Lady Becher who as Miss O'Neill had been the great Juliet of the former generation. But Shakespeare was not much in favour at that time, as now, and the young *débutante* found it better to gain practice and distinction in the portrayal of less classic characters; and she turned her attention to the modern romantic drama. In 1866 she appeared at the Princess's Theatre as Gabrielle de Savigny in 'The Huguenot Captain' by Mr. Watts Phillips. Her remarkable beauty at once gained her the interest of her hearers, and in spite of some awkwardness of bearing and gesture almost inseparable from a young and growing girl she gave great promise of future success. From the Princess's she went to the Adelphi, where in November of the same year she appeared as Victorine in a drama of the same name. The next year, in March she took part in the first production of Watts Phillips's 'Lost in London,' when she gained commendation for her spirited and pathetic impersonation of Nelly

Armroyd. Eighteen months later she attempted the part of Rosalind in 'As You Like It.' It was a favourite *rôle* with her, and she always attracted large and enthusiastic audiences to witness it, at least in the provinces. I well remember seeing her in this character at Birmingham, at the reopening of the Theatre Royal in September, 1876. The house was barely ready to receive its visitors ; but by dint of great exertion, when the hour for opening the doors arrived everything was in order and a large crowd pressed for admission. I remember her running down from her dressing-room across the stage to where, through a tiny hole in the curtain, she could catch a glimpse of the audience ; and I fancy I see now the look of delight that sparkled in her eyes when she found out her popularity was as great as ever. But Rosalind scarcely suited her. It was disappointing to those who had seen her Juliet, and certainly could not bear comparison with the finished representation of the same character so lately afforded by Miss Litton. Her American



friends, however, seem to have thought differently, as she is styled by some of them 'the only Rosalind, as she is the only Juliet.' 'One is caught, is taken captive, carried off one's feet in pure and blessed forgetfulness of the power that does it. One is impressed, is pleased, is charmed, and above all bathed in a sense of beauty and soothed in the possession of new and charming resources of pleasure.' No wonder that Miss Neilson appreciated her transatlantic audiences.

About the same time that she appeared as Rosalind she essayed Pauline in 'The Lady of Lyons,' and returned to her first dramatic impersonation of Julia in 'The Hunchback.' This was during her first engagement at the Theatre Royal, Edinburgh. In the spring of last year, on the failure of 'The Crimson Cross' at the Adelphi, she took up the *rôle* again and for a long time succeeded in drawing large and delighted audiences. Her acting in it struck one as somewhat artificial and conventional, and in the opening scenes at least, insipid and commonplace. This

impression wore off as the play proceeded ; but in no scene did she seem to take one's fancy by storm, or to give you the idea of natural spontaneity. It is fair to state, however, that others went away with very different ideas. They maintained that she completely identified herself with the character she sought to present, and that her delineation of the heroine was most accurate and ample ; that she was quick in perceiving and using to the best advantage all the opportunities that offered themselves for skilful and effective touches, and that it was to her inimitable acting that the play proved so successful.

In 1868 she ventured on the leading part in an English adaptation of Legouv  s ' *Beatrix ; ou la Madone de l'Art,*' tempted no doubt by the sensation Madame Ristori had created when playing the original at the Vaudeville in Paris. It appears not to have succeeded and we have heard nothing more about it ; but it is noticeable as showing the tendency there always is in the dramatic mind to imagine that what has been success-

ful in another's hands, although in a foreign country and a foreign tongue, is likely to prove the same when presented through the medium of a translation to a people of different social habits and ideas. It rarely answers, and it rarely deserves to. About the same time in Birmingham, where she was always a great favourite, she appeared in a dramatised version of Miss Braddon's story of 'The Captain of the Vulture ;' and the next year she made her first appearance at the Lyceum in London in the first performance of Dr. Westland Marston's play of 'Life for Life' in which she took the part of Lilian. She used often to say it was the most trying character she ever assumed. The play and its interpreter showed true tragic fire, and the young girl, for she was then barely twenty years old, rose to the occasion, and where the demands upon her resources were greatest she seems to have been most able to meet them. In all her acting she was too prone to attitudinise, but it cannot be denied that here she was at times dignified and

grand, that her tones of voice and expressions of countenance were fine and impressive, in some instances full of significant subtlety. But of course there was much yet to learn. There was a sameness that required breaking up, and a finish was needed to give the hearer a sense of naturalness. It was at times too evident that the actress was posing and speaking by rule. Her art was too apparent, a fault she manifested to the last. In the same year she appeared at the Gaiety in the first performance of 'A Life Chase,' and afterwards in 'Uncle Dick's Darling,' in which she took the part of Mary Belton. During all this time she was steadily advancing in public favour, and in the summer of 1870 she gave a series of readings in St. James's Hall, under the title of 'Dramatic Studies.' On the day that the first of these was to be given she found herself absolutely without voice. It was late in the forenoon and she could not speak above a whisper. Her fright and anxiety were intense. She was expecting to be honoured by the presence

of Royalty in the evening, and yet it seemed as if notices must be issued announcing her inability to fulfil her engagement. Her father-in-law who was in town had had occasion years before to grapple with similar difficulties, and he bethought himself of an invaluable remedy that even now is little known and never advertised. He set out to seek it in shop after shop, but was met everywhere with a shake of the head. Almost giving it up in despair he went into a chemist's in a retired street and once more asked for the desired object. The shopkeeper had it, but he knew nothing about its virtues as it was never inquired for. It had lain in his drawers a long time, and he had ceased to display it. He would very much like to know what it effected. His surprise was great when he was told afterwards that its constant and plentiful application to the patient's throat and chest during the afternoon of that day had resulted in Miss Neilson's complete restoration to her usual powers of voice. Her readings were very successful

but they were never resumed as no doubt she found it better 'both in reputation and profit' to keep to purely stage pursuits. In the autumn of the same year Andrew Halliday's great spectacular drama of 'Amy Robsart' was produced at Drury Lane and she was selected to create the title *rôle*. It would have been impossible at that date to find an actress whose natural and acquired powers were more suited to the character to be portrayed. She could be both tender and passionate and her personal charms aided so much her assumed individuality that nothing could have been finer than the scenes between herself and Leicester and again between herself and the jealous Queen. The drama is not in itself of any very high standard as a work of art, but it was exactly suited to Miss Neilson's abilities, and excepting Juliet, Amy Robsart was perhaps her finest achievement. It was in the December of 1870 that her delineation of Juliet at Drury Lane placed the top-stone on her dramatic career. Her face and figure, her

whole manner and deportment were so precisely fitted to the conception generally formed of this sweet girl-heroine of Shakespeare that it was felt nothing more was to be desired. Later on her very familiarity with the character somewhat impaired the spontaneity of her acting ; but just then, when she felt her fame was yet to win, she threw into the task all the powers at her command, and so distanced all other aspirants that for the rest of her career she was the 'only Juliet.' It was long since the stage had been blessed with a tragedienne of such high intelligence and rare voluptuous beauty. From long study she was perfectly at home in the routine of the play, and was therefore able to give herself up entirely to the realisation of the spirit of it. Her dark lustrous eyes, slight girlish figure, full lips and chin, and olive-tinted complexion, made up as perfect a type of southern beauty as could possibly be desired, and her rendering of the part was now a ripe and sustained performance. The fault that beset her throughout

her career, self-consciousness, almost disappeared in the intensity and power of the more tragic scenes, which reached at times a height in which art gave way to inspiration. Upon her first appearance she was the very picture of the young unsophisticated girl to whom marriage was an honour not yet dreamt of, and obedience to parental wishes the highest duty in life. Her simplicity was charming and her behaviour towards her mother and nurse was strikingly natural. In the next scene, that of the ball-room, the first kindling of womanly fire and passion was well marked and displayed. She was no longer a mere girl but a budding woman, upon whom the master-passion was beginning to work with fatal intensity. In the balcony scene the growth of its influence was still more evident. The girl had disappeared and we only saw the struggle between maidenly reserve and the full workings of a heart surprised into a confession of its inmost secrets. Miss Neilson here was true to nature. She abandoned herself to the



passion of the moment, and she carried away our sympathies, as, finding no denial open to her, she unreservedly declares her readiness to follow her lover through the world, come what may. Then followed her scene with the nurse in which she is called upon to exercise all her arts of cajolery to coax her perverse guardian into letting her know how matters stand with Romeo. Her expression of strained anxiety when she hears of her husband's mishap and Tybalt's death, and the way in which she cried,

‘O, break, my heart !—poor bankrupt, break at once !’

and again, when she finds herself exclaiming against her love, replies to the trimming nurse—

‘Blistered be thy tongue for such a wish !  
Upon his brow shame is ashamed to sit,  
For 'tis a throne where honour may be crown'd  
Sole monarch of the universal earth,’

were things to remember for many a long day. She was equally good in the parting between herself and Romeo, and in the cell with Friar Laurence. In the earlier part of

the scene where she takes the potion her bearing was natural and impressive. As she proceeded with the soliloquy, however, there was a tendency to exaggeration, and she made a mistake sweeping about the stage as she did, although I presume she was following received traditions. How many times she performed the part I really cannot tell, but it never failed to draw large crowds and to give delight to both actress and audience. Her heart was in the play, and here was no doubt the main secret of her success. In America the encomiums of the Press appear absurd to our more sober ways of thinking and writing. Take one or two specimens, the first from a St. Louis paper :

‘ The tender nature of the Saxon maiden, the voluptuous beauty of the Castilian, and the intense passion of the Italian, are all mingled in this one ideal ; but it was merely an ideal until Neilson made it real. We have dreamed over the beauties of Juliet in days gone by, and sighed to think that the brain of Shakespeare could conceive a being so-

gloriously beautiful that it could not be embodied on the stage. Pure as the lily, tender as the violet, and voluptuous as the rose, it was beyond human realization ; and all those who longed after the beautiful felt that Nature was doing her work miserably, for she could not let our eyes behold a woman who was the reality of our dreams. Miss Neilson appeared upon the stage and realised it all—aye, more than all, for the real Juliet was more beautiful than the ideal.’

Baltimore does not come far behind, if we may judge from the following :

‘ Miss Neilson’s subtle grace, flexible as the sinuosities of a morning’s mist, and yet thoroughly proportioned to the curves of the character, are most especially noticeable. Her action is throughout a compound of passion and grace, to which natural qualities are added a most perfect capacity of elocution. But her greatest acting occurs in her bedchamber, where she wearies and affrights her mind with gloomy foreboding as to the possible consequences of taking the sleeping-

potion, of awakening and imagining herself among her "buried ancestors." In this scene she is great. Her reading is exquisite, and her facial expression painfully, almost horribly, real.'

In March, 1871, Miss Neilson went on tour in the provinces. The towns she generally visited were few in number, being confined to Birmingham, Liverpool and Manchester in England; Glasgow and Edinburgh in Scotland; and Dublin in Ireland. In her first provincial tour she met with little encouragement and much disappointment, but on later occasions she was greeted with crowded houses and genuine enthusiasm; and popularity and fortune came to her hand in hand. Upon her return to London, she undertook the *rôle* of Rebecca, in a dramatic adaptation of Sir Walter Scott's 'Ivanhoe,' a successor to Amy Robsart on the same boards at Drury Lane. In this part the pathos and power of her acting was again acknowledged by the metropolitan Press. In December she appeared at the same theatre

as Rosalind, in a revival of 'As You Like It;' but of this impersonation I have no record by me. It was, perhaps, the weakest of her Shakespearian assumptions as it seemed the least adapted to her peculiar genius. Her comedy was indeed throughout strained and hard, although again our American friends think differently, for to them—

'The forest of Arden had rarely, if ever, such a Rosalind to inhabit it as Miss Neilson. She literally revelled in the fun attendant upon her sojourn in her forest home; and made the leafy woodland an abode of joy, of which she was the goddess. She has made the part her own; and all other competitors have abdicated their claims to the character, leaving her sole possessor of the honour of being the one personator of the *rôle*.'

The next year she gave a short series of farewell performances in the ill-fated Queen's Theatre in Long Acre, in which she included 'The Lady of Lyons.' Pauline was a character she seldom acted; but it seems to have been fairly successful. The great

triumph of her career was, however, still before her, as she was about to set sail for the United States, where she was received with very much greater fervour than she ever met with in London. From the moment of her first appearance at Booth's Theatre, New York, on the 18th of November, 1872, till her last performance on any stage in San Francisco, last July, she was looked forward to with unbounded delight, and remembered with unfailing pleasure. When theatrical matters were at a very low ebb indeed in the States, during the depth of the commercial depression two or three years ago, she was reported as the only one who was making money. At Richmond, Virginia, when she paid a visit to the capitol, the members of the State Legislature took a recess to admit of their being introduced to her. In Canada her performances were successful beyond all previous experience of the local managers; and in all places except New York, she, or the *entrepreneur* who had engaged her, obtained without difficulty from

forty to fifty per cent. of the gross receipts. Upon her last visit, Mr. Sala, who was in America at the same time, said the people were Neilson-mad ; and when she returned to Boston the ordinary arrangements for booking seats were quite inadequate to the demand and places were hardly secured at a high premium. No female artist had gone to America who had received so enthusiastic a welcome. The theatres were everywhere crowded with people eager to see and hear the new comer ; and, with the exception of two winters after her first appearance there, she continued to be the bright particular star of the American theatrical firmament till her death.

In America she first attempted several of her Shakespearian characters, as Beatrice in ‘*Much Ado about Nothing*,’ Viola in ‘*Twelfth Night*,’ Imogen in ‘*Cymbeline*,’ and Isabella in ‘*Measure for Measure*.’ Viola and Isabella she afterwards produced in London. Her Beatrice was a favourite assumption across the water. In it she exhibited new phases of her versatile genius ;

and in the opinion of some won a success equal to that of her Juliet. There was sparkle in every tone and gesture, and the artist appeared to rejoice in the portrayal of her subject.

I believe she crossed the Atlantic ten times making five tours. In the third of these she received ten thousand pounds for a hundred nights' performances, and in the fourth and fifth much more; her last engagement being to play a hundred times for twenty thousand pounds. She found the travelling, worry, and excitement exceedingly trying, although her constitution was singularly good, and several times she appeared in direct opposition to her doctor's advice. At one time she became so seriously ill that her recovery seemed doubtful; but nature triumphed, and she returned with fresh vigour to her art.

In America she received the homage of all classes of people in such different localities as Boston, New York, St. Louis and San Francisco. Longfellow, Bryant, and



others renowned in literature, wrote verses in her honour; and indeed the former was one of the last to pay his tribute of admiration and respect. She told me her last visit was to be one of farewell; but I can hardly believe she intended to retire definitively from her profession, as she was never more happy than when she was enjoying the triumphs of the stage. Mr. Edward Compton who accompanied her on her last tour has recorded in the *Era* some of the experiences she passed through. There, as in England, she made no personal enemies, although she was only too often looked upon as fair game for all kinds of swindlers and extortioners, and was the object of much envy and jealousy. As we have seen, she went so far as to naturalise herself as an American citizen and thus take advantage of the laws of the States; and like her operatic namesake she invested a great part of her earnings in real estate in New York that, however, declined so much in value as to be not worth the amount that had been left on mortgage

by the vendor. Her two last tours brought her in at least thirty thousand pounds, which, in spite of the enormous hotel expenses to which she was put, left her in possession of a very handsome fortune.

In her last seasons in England, those of 1876, 1878 and 1879, she appeared in two Shakespearian characters new to the London stage, viz. Isabella and Viola; and in two original parts—both of which, however, through no fault of hers, failed to secure success—Anne Boleyn in the play of the same name, and Queen Isabella of France in the ‘Crimson Cross.’ Of all these Isabella in ‘Measure for Measure’ attracted the most attention. It was a hazardous venture to present a play that makes so little call upon the sympathies of an audience, and in which there is so much directly offensive to modern taste. Considering these drawbacks the production must be declared a great success. Miss Neilson herself said: ‘People say my popularity is due to my face and dressing, rather than my talent. I want to prove to them that I can make a success

apart from these accessories, and in the simple garb of a nun do as well as in the costliest robes.' She had already acted the part of Isabella several times in America, but it was played in London the first time for nearly a quarter of a century, on the 1st of April, 1876, at the Haymarket. In spite of a vigorous censorship there remained in the acting version enough to scare away a great many good people who like Shakespeare well enough, but who cannot stand the suggestions of coarseness that in this instance could not be altogether eliminated. A play, however, is not immoral because some of its characters make indelicate allusions and use loose phrases. No actress of the present day was more scrupulous in her stage appearances as to propriety of dress, gesture, or expression than Miss Neilson. The comedy, of 'Measure for Measure' was produced with every attention to completeness of detail as to dramatic effect, and the acting was good all round. Charles Warner was Claudio; Mr. Howe, the Duke; Charles Harcourt,

Angelo; H. B. Conway, Lucio; and Mr. Buckstone, Pompey, so that the support given to the leading character was of no ordinary kind. Isabella in the play seems rather aggravating in her parade of virtue, and is too fond of showing off her moral superiority to folks in general; and we cannot altogether sympathise with the torrent of rage that greets her brother's humiliating confession. Miss Neilson's representation of the high-souled girl was admirable in its blending of sweetness and dignity, but at the same time there was a lack of power and intensity which she seemed in some instances to try to atone for by ultra-demonstrations of horror and indignation. But there could be but one voice as to the high intelligence and careful study that had been bestowed upon the interpretation; and it was a welcome fact that an actress of Miss Neilson's standing and attractions should have devoted her talents and popularity to the production of a play that presents so few points of interest to the ordinary playgoer. Previous to this

had come the gallant attempt to float the play of 'Anne Boleyn' into the stream of popular favour that unfortunately met with so little success. In the autumn of 1876 she met with enthusiastic welcome in the provinces, where 'Measure for Measure' was even better received than in London. The applause that greeted her at the conclusion of each act was tremendous, and her Manchester critics pronounced her Isabella to be 'one of the finest dramatic embodiments she had yet given to the public,' in some situations 'absolutely grand.' The last Shakespearian character she introduced in England was Viola in 'Twelfth Night,' in which her beauty of face appeared to great advantage. It was a careful and intelligent rendering of an attractive part and gave abundant pleasure to her audiences, although it was hardly one to link her name with in after years.

Her last season in London was in the spring of 1879. Messrs. Gatti had taken the lesseeship of the Adelphi, and had engaged a

powerful company to assist in the production of a new romantic drama, advertised as being arranged in so many tableaux, depicting an episode in French history. Besides Miss Neilson, the caste included such names as Hermann Vezin, Henry Neville, Charles Harcourt, Lydia Foote, and others of unquestioned ability. Miss Neilson herself threw her whole powers into the affair; she worked hard at rehearsals, provided the most costly and elaborate wardrobe, and spared no effort or expense to secure a great triumph. But all went for nothing. It was from no fault of the performers, but the public taste had been misjudged; and after some weeks of terrible uphill work, the play was abandoned and was followed by the revival of the 'Hunchback,' in which she played Julia, and which secured a long lease of popular favour. It was the first character she ever essayed in a recognised theatre, and it was almost the last in which her English friends had an opportunity of seeing her. She played Lady Teazle also during this

engagement and Amy Robsart ; but whilst this last was running, her connection with the Adelphi suddenly ceased, and she returned to the Haymarket for a short series of farewell performances, previous to her departure for America. It proved indeed a final farewell to the English stage.

In October of the year before last she left England, and never returned to make any stay. Here we may pause to gather up the story of her dramatic career. It commenced in 1865 and terminated in 1879, a period of fourteen years, during which, in addition to the characters that were merely of temporary interest, she appeared at different times as Juliet, Rosalind, Beatrice, Isabella, Viola ; and in America, Imogen—a round of Shakspearian delineations that all reflected the highest credit upon her dramatic genius. In addition to these classic renderings, we may enumerate Julia, Lady Teazle, Pauline, Amy Robsart, and Anne Boleyn, the last two being her own creations. It is no light thing to be able to say of anyone dying at the early age of

thirty or thirty-one, that she had succeeded in interesting critical English audiences in each one of these varying characters, and that one of them she made during her lifetime indisputably her own, viz. Juliet. With that in classical and with Amy Robsart in modern romantic drama, her name will always be peculiarly associated. It cannot of course be denied that she had in her favour the priceless dower of remarkable beauty. Her appearance was enough to draw large crowds to see her ; but in addition to this she had a natural talent for acting which she diligently cultivated : and to her lasting credit it must be said that she never allowed herself to presume upon her personal attractions and to neglect the hard study and earnest labour which a conscientious devotion to her profession demanded. From the time she was a mere girl to her death she worked assiduously and intelligently at her craft. What she may have lacked in inspiration she supplied by careful attention to instruction. Her impersonations were always painstaking, and



she was never satisfied till she had done all that lay in her power. Her relations with her fellow-artists were kindly and considerate. Of course there were jealousies, as there are in all professions; but, as was remarked by one of those who knew her many years: 'I do not remember one single instance in which she ever said an ill word of man or woman.' Whoever she was associated with, it was the same. Let them be high in birth and rich in circumstances, or let them be her immediate servants and dependents, she made every effort to please. Indeed it was a passion with her, and none were more enthusiastic in their admiration of her than those who knew her best.

As an actress it may be she lacked power, but for pathos and sentiment few have ever surpassed her. Her Juliet was certainly by far the best that the present generation has seen. The *Athenæum* says of her: 'She was the only actress on the English stage who has in recent days displayed power genuinely tragic. In comedy her method was less

natural, and her Viola and Rosalind were more remarkable for brilliancy and vivacity than for poetic suggestion. In such characters as Lilian in Dr. Westland Marston's "Life for Life," Julia in the "Hunchback," and Amy Robsart, she was seen to high advantage. Making due allowance for faults of method to be expected in one whose early training did not fit her for the stage she is entitled to high praise, and the void she leaves will not be easily filled. She had a thoroughly frank and open nature, and won sincere affection from not a few distinguished members of the world of letters. Starting with no advantages beyond physical gifts, Miss Neilson made herself very rapidly a name which is likely to last in theatrical annals. Her first performance of Juliet at the Royalty Theatre in July, 1865, which was practically her *début* on the stage, was a signal success. It was seen by few, but those who were present formed auguries concerning the future which were speedily fulfilled.'

No doubt she had faults, both as an actress

and a woman. With the latter we wish to have nothing to do, but rather to point out the undoubted excellences in her character that may be admired and imitated. From the baleful breath of slander she was no more free than others have been whose names are so much in the public mouth. We know very little of such scandal, and seek to know no more. So far as one's personal knowledge of her goes there was nothing to call for suspicion or reproof. She loved popularity, but she knew what it was worth, and what it involved. 'I am going to America,' she said to me once, 'and should I fall ill and die, there will be no one to care for me;' and at another time, in speaking of her great success and the fortune that attended it, she remarked, 'I am at the top of the tree now, and can scarcely hope to get any higher; but if I were unable to work for myself I do not know a soul who would help me.'

Her final tour in America was an unparalleled triumph. She contemplated adding another Julia to her repertoire, the Julia of

‘Two Gentlemen of Verona;’ and once or twice she told me she hoped at some time to attempt *Lady Macbeth*, but she knew that could not be for years, and indeed, she confessed she felt neither physically nor mentally ripe for it. The last time I saw her was in her dressing-room at the Adelphi after a performance of the ‘*Hunchback*,’ in the spring of 1879. She struck me then as being much older in face and figure than I expected to find her, and I was surprised at two years making such a difference.

Her generosity to needy fellow-artists was only limited by her means, and a glance at the counterfoils of her cheque-book revealed the wide extent of her beneficence. One day, as she handed a draft for ten pounds to a professional in distress, she said, ‘I would gladly let you have more, but I am even doubtful if the bank will cash that amount.’ A pleasing hyperbole, no doubt intended merely to express the temporary limited nature of the means at her command.

When in America she made hosts of

friends, amongst whom she has left many memorials of her kind and sunny nature ; but the perpetual moving about and irregular habits of living were highly prejudicial to her health. The nervous dyspepsia of which she had complained for some years returned at times with redoubled force, and she frequently acted with a doctor in attendance behind the scenes. Her bravery under such circumstances was indomitable. I remember her once in the midst of a performance suddenly pressing her hand to her bosom and crying out in tones of startling agony, ‘ Oh, my heart ! ’ but after a temporary fall of the curtain she resumed her part and went through with it to the end.

Some of the little souvenirs she left behind her in the States are wonderfully pathetic as read in the light of subsequent events. On the backs of photographs that she gave her friends, she used often to write short quotations or legends in some way appropriate to the circumstances attending the gift. Thus ‘ *Sis memor usque mei* ’ is inscribed on the

original of the frontispiece to this little volume ; and Mr. Compton tells us that on one she gave away before leaving for Europe she wrote, in the words of the Juliet she so incomparably rendered, ‘ Farewell ! Heaven knows when we shall meet again,’ and in another instance, ‘ Tout lasse, tout passe, tout casse.’ But I do not imagine she had any forebodings of an early death. Indeed upon her arrival in England last August she appeared remarkably well and seemed to be in the best of spirits. It had been her custom the last two or three years to spend her holidays on the Continent, and especially in Paris ; and this year she had been looking forward to a long rest. From San Francisco, the scene of her last appearance on any stage she crossed the continent to New York, and immediately came over to Liverpool. After spending a very little time in England, she arrived in Paris on Wednesday, August 12th. It is said, but I do not know on what authority, that she was about to make arrangements with Sardou

for the production of one of his plays in English ; but she determined on taking several months' holiday before entering on any more theatrical ventures. Her long-continued exertions in America and the handsome fortune they had secured her warranted her in anticipating the enjoyment of a long holiday. She was accompanied to Paris by her companion who had been faithfully devoted to her for some years and Mr. Compton who had acted as her leading supporter on the American stage. She engaged rooms at the Hôtel Continental and everything promised well for her stay. On the following Saturday she drove out to the Bois de Boulogne in a landau, accompanied by her companion, her maid, and Mr. Compton. 'She was dressed entirely in white, and wore a straw bonnet trimmed with lace. At the vacherie of the Pré Catalan, she stopped a moment and drank a glass of iced milk. A few minutes after she was attacked with severe pain, and ordering the coachman to stop, she got out at the Nouveau Châlet du Rond-Royal, and herself asked for

a private room that she might rest awhile till the pain subsided. She was shown into a room containing a couch, a round table and a *table à manger*. She lay down and asked for some tea. This was given her, mixed with a little brandy, and a message was sent to Dr. Monnier, who arrived about four o'clock. By this time the pain had become more intense, and vomiting had set in. On the doctor's coming in, he found great physiological disturbance and irritation, severe pain in the back, and oppression of the chest. Her pulse was scarcely perceptible. He ordered linseed-meal poultices to be applied and administered laudanum and ether, but the pain was not permanently relieved. Soon after she fell into a swoon but was restored by the application of warmth. A little later a bat flew in at the open window, and hovered around the couch. 'Look at that great bird flying about me!' she said. I am not aware whether she was superstitious or not, but the presence of the creature disturbed her as it would the strong-



est mind under such circumstances. At last there came relief, and she begged Mr. Compton to have his dinner in the room, and whilst he did so, she was able to talk ; but at seven o'clock she became worse again, and her maid was sent to fetch her own medical man, Dr. W. E. Johnston, of the Boulevard Malesherbes. Unfortunately he was not at home. He had attended her during her visits to Paris for the last five years, and had often treated her for gastralgia by the free use of morphine. This particular form of dyspepsia is exceedingly fantastic in its coming and going and as often induced by mental disorders as by errors of diet. In his absence Dr. Gantillon, the usual medical attendant to the Hôtel Continental, was called in, and he prescribed a remedy which again brought relief. During the lull, her companion and maid dined successively ; and then, finding it impossible to move her without great pain, they made a kind of bed for her on which to pass the night. Towards midnight the agony returned, and she fell

into convulsions, tearing the stuff of the couch with her contracted fingers. Dr. Monnier was again sent for, but on his arrival he found her apparently asleep. Not wishing to disturb her he left the room for a short interval, and on his return found her dead. At three o'clock on the Sunday morning, during a most violent recurrence of the pain she suddenly ceased to complain, and fell into a swoon from which she never revived. A post-mortem examination was held the next day and it was found she had ruptured a varicose vein internally, and had died from hæmorrhage. What caused this fearful end to so young and promising a life is a matter for medical rather than general discussion. The nervous dyspepsia of which she had so often complained, sometimes before smilingly sceptical friends, was indeed a terrible reality. It affected her spirits as much as her body and made her anxiously nervous about herself, as she feared she might have disease of the heart or some other serious and deep-seated organic disorder. Of that, however, there

was not the slightest trace. Indeed she was, according to her own London doctor, 'a most perfectly organised woman.'

But her habits of life were fatal to good health. Day after day she had to attend trying rehearsals, and combat the worries and troubles connected with them; then at irregular hours she took dinner, and sometimes when from long abstinence she was faint and wearied. After that came a short rest, and then a long heavy performance, which she often had to undergo by the repeated help of sal volatile or other stimulants. Then would come supper, when there was the temptation common to those who have much speaking to do, when the labours for the day are over, to eat too heartily; and so when the long-delayed opportunity for sleep came, the physical powers were too excited or jaded to allow of its being taken advantage of. The end was inevitable, unless the mode of life could be altered; but how soon the end was to be, occurred to no one.

The day she died her body was removed

to the Morgue, not in the harrowing manner described in some of the public prints, but reverently and carefully. There the investigation necessary in case of so sudden and strange a death was carried out. It is pathetic indeed to follow in fancy across Paris the little cortége that accompanied the remains of the fair girl as they returned mute and senseless from the drive on which they had set out the day before, instinct with beauty and full of life and gaiety. It was at once determined to bury her in London, and arrangements were made for the funeral to be at the West Brompton Cemetery at noon of Friday, the 20th of August. The day was cold for the time of the year, and the sky was overcast. Coming up from the country I expected to find a few score of people at the grave-side beyond the group of recognised mourners; but as I neared the cemetery I was astonished to see long streams of people converging to the same spot, many of them wearing mourning; and from little snatches of conversation and chance ex-

pressions caught in passing, it was easy to tell the greater number were no mere holiday-makers, but persons who felt a deep and sincere regard for the one to whose memory they wished to pay the only tribute in their power. In the burial-ground itself the crowds that lined the central carriage-road and surrounded the space roped off round the grave were such as are rarely to be seen at any private funeral. The body arrived at the chapel punctually at twelve o'clock. It was enclosed in three coffins, the outer one being plain polished oak with solid brass mountings. It was veiled with a rich violet pall, and upon this several wreaths and crosses of white flowers. How sad it was to think that she who had so smilingly acknowledged the hundreds of bouquets thrown to her by so many admirers now lay within that narrow casket utterly unconscious of the floral offerings that she was to bear with her to the tomb. Through the night she had been rapidly travelling in her funeral robes to the community that had first welcomed her to its

brotherhood of art and placed the crown of dramatic triumph on her fair young brow, and which was now to receive her for ever in one of its crowded cities of the dead. There were few of her professional brethren present. It was the depth of the dull season, and most were far away enjoying the holiday that she had hoped to share in ; but such as were at hand helped to lead in the favourite artist before the curtain fell for ever upon her last farewell. But, as was to be expected at such a busy time of the day, the majority of on-lookers were women, of all ages and from all ranks of society.

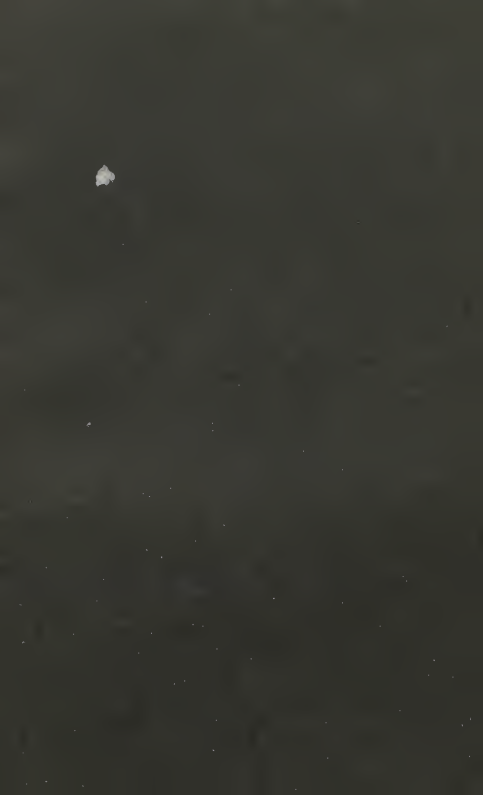
The authorities had evidently not expected such a crowd, and had provided very inadequately for the preservation of order, so that the procession from the chapel to the place of actual interment was little more than a scramble. By dint of hard struggles the mourners at last reached the grave, which half-way down was lined with violet cloth. Slowly the flower-covered coffin was lowered out of sight of all except those who stood im-

mediately above it, and the solemn words of the Burial Service were scarcely to be heard amidst the sobs that burst alike from strong men and tender women. In a few moments all was over. More flowers were thrown to her, and then for a long time the immense crowd that had gathered around streamed past the spot where the Juliet so many had seen before lying 'in Capels' monument,' now lay in the tomb from which there could be no arising. Looking down into the grave nothing could be seen but flowers, most of them pure white blossoms of the choicest varieties, but some were simple garden roses and many coloured asters the only tokens of affection their donors had to offer. It was inexpressibly sad to leave that beautiful girl whom one had never learned to associate with illness or decay, for whose death there had been no warning or preparation, shut in by the narrow bounds of that cell whose door will never open to let her forth again. Here at length she has set up her everlasting rest. After life's fitful fever

she sleeps well. Into those thirty years how much had been condensed. From a humble and obscure origin she had by the power of her beauty and force of her genius won her way to a position that the proudest might envy and the most famous could not overtop.

Through all Great Britain and America the tidings of the death of the unknown basket-maker's daughter gave a shock of pain and evoked a thrill of pity. Her short life had been one of strange experiences. Lowly as her early surroundings were, she found her later home in the sweet and peaceful retirement of a country clergyman's rectory ; whilst there were thrown open to her visits the halls of the wealthy and the castles of the high. Domestic trouble, professional worries, and weary labours fell to her lot, however, as well as popular favour and golden fortune. But none of these things corroded the brightness of her temper, or soured the sweetness of her disposition. ' She was as graceful and charming in her own house, as she was upon the stage.' As an artist she strained every





# DATE DUE

FEB 18 2013

325.1289

W313

